

Catechism, Sec 4: How Man Sinned

by B. S. Poh

Q13. Did our first parents continue in the state they were created?

A13. Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the state they were created by eating the forbidden fruit¹, thereby sinning against God².

Notes: Following, C. H. Spurgeon, we have changed the old English word “estate” to “state” in both the question and the answer, and eliminated the question after the next, viz. “What is the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?” by bringing the answer into the present one.

1. *Gen. 3:6-8, So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*
2. *Eccl. 7:29, Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.*

Comments

1. Adam and Eve had free will in the sense that they had the *liberty* and *ability* to choose whether or not to obey God. Satan could tempt them, but he could not force them to act. The one command God gave them in the garden of Eden was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The incentive for them to obey was that they could eat of the myriads of other trees. The warning against disobedience was that they would die. By disobeying God, they fell from the state of innocence into the state of sin. That first sin of Adam and Eve is often called the Fall.
2. Arminianism wrongly teaches that man has free will in the same way that Adam and Eve had. However, the Fall has caused man to lose the *ability* to choose what is pleasing to God, although he still retains the *liberty* of choice. Man’s will is in bondage to his nature, which is now sinful.
3. Liberalism wrongly teaches that the story of the Fall is not factual, but a fable containing moral truths found in the experiences of man. Liberals, also known as modernists, largely accept the teaching of evolution concerning the origin of man, and reject the authority of the Bible. The Lord Jesus Christ, however, accepted the account of the Fall as true (Matt. 19:4), and so did the apostle Paul (Rom. 5:12-21).

Q14. What is sin?

A14. Sin is any lack of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God¹.

1. 1 Jn. 3:4, Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

Comments

1. There are *sins of omission*, i.e. the failure to do what is commanded by God. There are also *sins of commission*, i.e. the doing of what is forbidden by God. The law of God, whether given as one command to Adam and Eve, or as Ten Commandments to the nation of Israel, or as two great commandments by the Lord Jesus Christ, requires perfect obedience from man (James 2:10). This we have failed miserably (Gal. 3:10-12; Rom. 3:10).
2. Sin is defined in reference to the law of God. When defined in reference to man, it becomes *subjective*, i.e. based on one's feeling, and *relative*, i.e. different for different individuals. In the Fall, the devil shifted the focus from God's command to Eve's desire and choice (Gen. 3:4-5). Sin is primarily directed against God, and secondarily against man. We sin against man only because we have broken God's law, and therefore, offended God first. The prodigal son confessed, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son (Luke 15:21)."

Q15. Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?

A15. All mankind descending from Adam by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression, because he was their representative in the covenant God made with man^{1,2}.

Notes: The clause, "The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself but for his posterity," has been changed to "because he was their representative in the covenant God made with man," and moved to the end of the answer. That way, the answer is a direct response to the question, while the changed clause is subordinate.

1. Rom. 5:18, Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.

2. 1 Cor. 15:22, For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Comments

1. We have no choice in certain matters, e.g. the circumstances of our birth. God sovereignly determines such matters for us. Just as the president, or prime minister, of a country may speak on behalf of all the people in the country, Adam stood in behalf of the human race before God. When Adam sinned against God, the whole of mankind sinned in him. When Adam fell in his first transgression, the whole of mankind fell with him.
2. Jesus Christ did not descend from Adam by ordinary generation. Instead, He was conceived in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit and was protected from sin by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). He is sinless, although deriving His human nature from Mary (John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Q16. Into what state did the fall bring mankind?

A16. The fall brought mankind into a state of sin and misery¹.

Notes: Again, the word “estate has been changed to “state” in both the question and the answer.

1. Rom. 5:12, Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.

Comments

1. The Fall had consequences upon mankind. From the state of innocence and blessedness enjoyed by Adam and Eve before the Fall, mankind plunged into a state of sin and misery.

Q17. Q. What is the sinfulness of that state into which man fell?

A17. All mankind, by their fall, became guilty in Adam’s first sin¹ and corrupt in their whole nature, which is commonly called original sin^{2,3,4}, leading to all actual transgressions⁵.

Notes: The question has been simplified to correspond with the form of the next question, both of which are intended to elucidate the answer of Q15. The answer leaves out “the want of original righteousness” since that is stated in another way in the next phrase, “corrupt in their whole nature”. Also, the closing clause, “together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it” has been tidied up.

1. Rom. 5:19, For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.

2. Rom. 3:10, As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one.”

3. Eph. 2:1, And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

4. Ps. 51:5, Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

5. Matt. 15:19, For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

Comments

1. Man, in his sinful state, is faced with two problems - first, that of guilt due to Adam’s sin, and second, that of a corrupt nature transmitted down from Adam and Eve. The corrupt nature in man inclines him to break God’s law so that he becomes guilty of his own acts of sin.

2. This does not mean that man is as sinful as he possibly can be, nor is he as sinful as those in hell or the devil. The *degree* of sin must be distinguished from the *extent* of sin. Man is corrupt in his whole nature, not just in some parts of it. This has been called Total Depravity. This means that man is incapable of pleasing God in anything, unless his two problems are solved in some ways.

Q18. What is the misery of that state into which man fell?

A18. All mankind, by their fall, lost communion with God¹, are under His wrath and curse^{2,3}, and so made liable to all the miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever^{4,5}.

1. Gen. 3:8, 24, And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

2. *Eph. 2:3, Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.*
3. *Gal. 3:10, For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."*
4. *Rom. 6:23, For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
5. *Matt. 25:41, Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'*

Comments

1. The *immediate* effects of the Fall upon mankind are that they lost the blessed fellowship with God and came under His wrath and curse. The *life-long* effects are that they become exposed to the pain and sufferings brought about by sin, including death itself. The *everlasting* effect is that they will experience the pains of hell, first in their souls, and after the judgement, in their souls and bodies together.
2. Annihilationism teaches that the souls of the wicked will gradually cease to exist (annihilated) while being punished in hell. The Bible's teaching is that there is everlasting punishment in hell for the wicked, whose destiny is irrevocably sealed at death. In other words, there is no "second chance" to be reconciled with God after death.

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